

Redefining the Nation through Translating Bhasha literature: Problems, Perspectives and Prospects.

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Abstract: *Indian Literature may have been divided in many languages, nonetheless, in commonality has described about the problems that are persisting all over India. The text is rooted in the context and in order to decolonize the mind, translation of regional literature becomes mandatory. With English as a filter language, translation has become both a linguistic and cultural activity which is concerned with communication of meaning. For a country like India it is a very delicate and challenging matter to deal with a national identity that derives its strength from its multiple layers of social, religious, cultural and linguistic diversity. Translators have always played a pivotal role in social and cultural change in society by expanding knowledge and information. Through this paper the researcher has tried to focus on one of the Marathi plays "Sonata" translated by Mahesh Elkunchwar. The play is about people drawn into themselves. Though the play has been dramatized on three independent women, the theme is universal. The paper has tried to take into consideration people with dramatic exteriors but a pain of inner loneliness not far below that gets achingly more intense with every lie they tell the world and also themselves. The researcher has also made an attempt to point out gender issues, isolation and impersonal relationships in the play. The female characters of the play "Sonata" represent a wide variety of Indian female population who are placed in proper context and background revealing how they suffer or prosper, win or lose, get mentally disoriented or overpower their neurosis.*

Key words: *Translation, Regional Literature, independent women, isolation, relationships.*

1. INTRODUCTION

As an identity of literature depends essentially on nationality and not on language, it is said that only regional literatures- called Bhasha literatures are the national literatures of India. In spite of the apparent heterogeneity of the literary scene in India, the multilingual Indian literary scenario is marked by the existence of Indian writing in English and regional language literatures translated in English. India is a cultural memory in which the history of its society is embedded. Society remembers and participates in this history when it is put in a context. Hence, it paves a pivotal role for the translators to recreate this participatory experience of the source language culture by relocating it in the target language so that the reader can participate in an alien cultural experience. Translators have the power to act as connectors between cultures and languages. Since English is the language of interaction and the most natural language for emotional and creative expression, in order to globalize and localize any literary work, it is mandatory to translate it into English. As stated by Paul St. Pierce in "A Handbook of Translation Studies" by Bijay Kumar Das:

The importance of translation can be located in the fact that translation brings the readers, writers, and critics of one nation into contact with those of others, not only in the field of literature, but in all areas of human development: Science and Philosophy, Medicine, Political Science, Law and Religion, to name but a few. [Das.79]

Thus translation helps in the course of nation building. There is a strong interconnection between translation and the constitution of national identity. Through translations nations define themselves and in doing so they define others. Furthermore, when the medium of translation is English, it brings to surface a different cultural context of any social evil existing in the Indian

society. English shares the common ground of Indian realities. As stated by Chandran in “English Bhasha: A Commentary through Three Indian Narratives by Paranjape:

When English narrates an episode, its commitment as a medium gets resolutely directed towards a Bhasha and its ethos in question. [Paranjape.18]

Undoubtedly, English is the language of empowerment and emancipation. This paper has attempted to focus on the translation of a Marathi play “Sonata”, by Mahesh Elkunchwar, into English. The title of the play takes its name from one of the most important forms in western classical music- “The Sonata”. Beethoven’s “Moonlight Sonata” is dreamy and draws listeners into themselves. “Sonata” by Mahesh Elkunchwar is all about people drawn into themselves.

2. “SONATA”- A UNIVERSAL THEME

“Sonata” is about three single working women, living in Mumbai, a journalist, a teacher of Sanskrit and one employed in a big post in a multinational. They share a life of solidarity and freedom. Not only do they have an aura of sophistication but each of them is also successful at work. They have a strong bonding and share a comfort zone despite their differences. The three women- Subhadra, Aruna and Dolon, represent the women of today, who irrespective of their origin, live a western life. They might have a dramatic exterior but a pain of loneliness is always eating them up. As Samik Bandyopadhyay states:

Elkunchwar gives them a physical/stage site, which seems to float among heights of Mumbai skyscrapers with a sense of cocooned security that is threatened from within again and again; the lonesome intimacy itself provoking the barbs and charges that fly between them. [Elkunchwar. xxvii, xxviii]

“Sonata” delves deeper into the lives of these three friends, who are seemingly lost. Dolon and Aruna have been sharing a flat for the past seventeen years; still it is quite visible that they have been continuously rejecting each other as a protection mechanism from getting too close. There are certain reasons behind it. Dolon with her bright and vivacious character on the surface, but a concealed loneliness within represents those contemporary women living the same kind of fake life. Whereas Aruna, who has been emotionally hurt by her lover, is an introverted bitterly school teacher and represents those women who are never at peace and blame all men folk for the miseries of women. Subhadra, the third woman hides the fact delicately that she is tormented and abused by her lover. She is discontented to the core. But she represents those women, who, under no circumstances can live without a male counterpart in their lives. These kinds of women, keep returning to their abuser, rather than risking loneliness.

Though the play had been written in Marathi, but we can relate the three characters to the new women of India in general, with different temperaments that live an independent life.

3. STARK REALITIES OF LIFE IN A METRO

The people of metros are self sufficient and can afford to flaunt their temperamental and cultural differences- just like the three women in “Sonata”. But in spite of leading a life as per their wishes they go through a tremendous sense of being lost and lonely. Elkunchwar has beautifully highlighted some of these stark realities of life in a metro: loneliness, gender issues, isolation and impersonal relationships.

4. LONELINESS LEADING TO ISOLATION

There is no flinching from the truth that loneliness has been around those living in a metro, despite all the comforts they enjoy in their daily lives. Loneliness has attained more relevance today in the wake of ever increasing penetration of the most superlative multifarious technologies. It is ironical that even the ever increasing population and expanding cities have not been able to eradicate loneliness. As in the play “Sonata”- Aruna, Dolon and Subhadra, the three college friends have chosen to remain single. Though they are successful and have great prominence in their professional fields, yet are not free from the pangs of loneliness. They keep going back to the memories of their past and gently trace the roots of the small town they grew up in. Aruna, who appears to be a cold untouchable woman, shares her longing of going home with Dolon.

Aruna- I’m planning to go home next week.

Dolon- Sure.

Aruna- Twenty five years in Mumbai but I still think of home. [Elkunchwar.251-252]

Aruna has a strong urge to go back home but somehow she never does so. She remembers her nephews and nieces and invites Dolon to join her for her visit to her home town. She is heard saying:

Let's go for a few days..... My nephews and nieces will dance around you with joy. Dolonmawshi, Dolonmawshi..... [Elkunchwar.252]

But when Dolon asks her the age of her nephews and nieces, Aruna is not able to recall it properly.

The youngest is five, I think....or six maybe..... [Elkunchwar.252]

At this Dolon remarks-

You don't even remember that..... You always say you'll go. You never do.... [Elkunchwar. 252]

Aruna has been embittered by society. She is an introvert. In spite of the longing of going back home, she knows that she cannot go back because nobody at home wants her to come home. When we see Dolon talking about their lonely typist neighbor, her monotonous life style, and wondering if the latter had somebody, somewhere who might send her a postcard; we hear Aruna recalling-

The roof is leaking. Need money for repairs. Mother sinking rapidly. Losing her vision too. Wonder if you can take her in for a few days? Bal failed again. We want to send him to a computer class. But where is the money, with all these expenses? This year Ganesh festival will be a poor affair. You mustn't tire yourself and come here. [Elkunchwar. 255]

Aruna articulates her innermost feelings of being left alone in this mad world where as Dolon puts a fake appearance and conceals her inner loneliness. In order to be in peace with her loneliness she finds solace in her belief that her neighbor is the loneliest person. She loves to watch her routine movements through the window of her flat. Dolon knows that at exactly eight at night, her neighbor would enter her flat and switch on the light finds some kind of inner satisfaction when she sees her neighbor everyday.

Now she will open the shutters. There it goes. She will throw her handbag on the bed. Right. Now the earrings on the dresser. Done. Now a drink of water. Great. Lovely. Now she will install herself in front of the PC and won't move her ass till midnight..... [Elkunchwar. 253]

It seems as if Dolon is talking about her innermost feelings when speaks about her neighbors.

She must be terribly friendless. Looks so alone. [Elkunchwar. 254]

No matter Dolon pretends to have a dramatic exterior with her frivolous behavior about spending money on clothes perfumes, etc. but she is torn from within. She also wavers away all her troubles in the smoke of her cigarettes and finds repose in the glasses of her wine. If Aruna is stiff from inside and is called a sadist, she reflects the same outward image. Dolon compares herself to Aruna:

Can't live like you. Control. Total self control. Perennial. The way you walk, talk, sit. Controlled. I like to speak. I like to express myself. Yes, I am demonstrative. And I am not a bit ashamed of it. [Elkunchwar. 258]

This outer explosion of Dolon's thoughts about her being demonstrative is contrary to her inner pain of being isolated in this widely populated world where no one can understand her. As she states:

Why do people dislike me? [Elkunchwar. 257]

People call me frivolous. [Elkunchwar. 260]

It seems she would be happy to accept death as she quotes a few lines from Emily

Dickinson's poem "Because I could not Stop for Death" and states-

What a blessing people die..... [Elkunchwar. 283]

5. GENDER ISSUES

Although legally and theoretically woman is now recognized as a social equal of man but we still hear about women harassment and sexual abuse. Male dominance is still very prevalent. As Anu Seth writes in her article about Indian society-

Indian society has always been patriarchal, with male dominance conspicuous in every aspect of social life; a society where even today the majority of women find their identity linked to that of their father or husband, undermining their ability to exist in their own right.

[<http://www.ezinearticles.com/>]

The male superiority is so deeply entrenched that it is carried on unconsciously over generations and lays the foundation of inequality between men and women. It is unfortunate that women themselves perpetuate this inequality in the generations that succeeds them. In this play "Sonata" Elkunchwar has tried to depict the acceptance of male dominance through the character of Subhadra, who keeps returning to her lover even after being abused and beaten up several times. Whenever she had a fight with her lover, Sangram, she comes to her friends to seek connectedness and love. Although Subhadra undergoes immense pain and torture when she is with Sangram, yet she is not ready to live without him when her friends openly speak about their dislike for Sangram, it makes no difference to Subhadra.

Aruna- What is the mark under the eye?

Subhadra- He hit me.

Dolon- (gasps) Again?

Subhadra- It's our routine, Sweetie pie. [Elkunchwar. 264]

Subhadra tries to take the matter lightly when she sees her friends Dolon and Aruna infuriated.

Dolon- But who started it today? Not you, Subhe, How dare he?

Subhadra- It's all right yaar.... Dolon, don't you like my Sangram? [Elkunchwar. 264]

This question by Subhadra draws our attention to the opinion of Aruna and Dolon about men, which unconsciously tells us about the different temperaments of the contemporary women on the same issue.

When the question is put up to Dolon by Subhadra, the conversation among the three women brings out their different opinion about men.

Dolon- From a distance, from a distance. [Elkunchwar. 264]

Aruna- Ass! Don't go back now for a few days.

Dolon- From a distance he is all right. All men in fact.

Aruna- Let him come here and get down on his knees before you.

Dolon- Here? That boor- unwashed, unkempt?

Aruna- Subhe, I am glad you didn't marry him.

Dolon- I'm sure he smells of diesel and petrol.

Subhadra- (brings her hand under Dolon's nose). Find out.

Aruna- You can walk out of him any time.

Subhadra- I will.

Dolon- And get another one. [Elkunchwar. 265]

This shows how each one of them has a different opinion about men and being in a relationship with them. Aruna simply dislikes men as she herself has been through a broken relationship with

Avinash. On the other hand Dolon thinks that all men are the same with an animal instinct and debarred of any trace of human feelings. Subhadra does not want to risk loneliness, or as she fools herself with the thought, and so is ready to accept her abuser. Though she tells her friends that she would walk out of Sangram's life, she knows it would never happen and she tries to justify her choice.

He is good. Very. [Elkunchwar. 265]

He isn't that bad! [Elkunchwar. 275]

He's really like a child. [Elkunchwar. 275].

Nonetheless, Subhadra thinks that Sangram is very good, but he possesses a typical Indian male attitude that gets jealous at the drop of a hat. It is a privilege of men to look at other women and feel proud when other women look at them but if some other man looks at their woman, they get infuriated with jealousy. It is clear when Subhadra herself admits-

Sangram, he gets so jealous. I can't even look at anybody. He begins to see red at the drop of a hat. [Elkunchwar. 273]

When the boy living in the opposite building makes passes on Subhadra, she feels pathetic, not because of the passes but due to Sangram's attitude towards her. He gets enraged at her, instead of the boy. She desperately wants to leave him but when he comes to take her; she easily picks up her bag to go back with him. Earlier when Aruna had asked her to leave him she had bluntly replied-

And do what? Sit at home like a jogan? [Elkunchwar. 273]

Subhadra's plight is in no way different from many contemporary women, who willingly undergo the torture and suffering with a smile and under no circumstances accept to stay without their male counterpart.

6. IMPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS

Elkunchwar has pointed out impersonal relationships in the play "Sonata" where the three women believe that the most significant part of their emotional life lies within themselves. They are more protected with each other but less connected. They live at a time when their friendship becomes both all and nothing at all. Their relationships are connected in terms of which they are understood and measured, at the same time, dissolved in the same. They pretend to be satisfied as they have established a so called close relationship with each other, which they think is the major contribution to their happiness. They might be the best friends living together for years, but each has her own private self hidden from the other. As Samik Bandyopadhyay writes:

The vulnerability and delicacy of the relationship among the three is played and simultaneously in terms of the continuing shifts in position and the private obsessions that they cherish and project to hide their raw sores, for example, Dolon's bottles of male ala Stanley Kowalski, and Aruna's intellectual- creative pretensions are obsessions that manifest themselves in intensely private spaces, often with a touch of poetry, as when Dolon turns Aruna into veiled beauty and "adores" her, visualizing a secret, unspoken desire. [Elkunchwar. xxix]

Nonetheless, their relationships come out as a psychodrama when there is an interaction between Dolon and Aruna. Though the two women have been living together for the past seventeen years, yet there is some unspoken distance between them. Time to time Dolon is eaten up by this inner guilt and many a times we hear her repenting. Deep down she has a feeling that Aruna dislikes her to the core but pretends to be normal. But Dolon cannot take this cold, uncaring and devoid of emotions, attitude from Aruna. She is heard telling her:

You can live in the past tense all you like. Not me. Why are you so intentionally cruel to me? [Elkunchwar. 260]

Furthermore, Dolon also accuses Aruna that she had hijacked her life, when the latter wrote her short story that was awarded. Dolon thinks that the story is based on her. Infuriated Dolon also tells Aruna that the title of the story was inappropriate.

Betrayal would have been a better title. [Elkunchwar. 278]

It seems as if it is Dolon's guilt that makes her think that the story is based on her because Aruna clearly tells her that it is not Dolon is the story.

That woman is not you. May be some similarities- only a few externalities? [Elkunchwar. 279]

Nevertheless, Dolon does not believe her.

Don't give me that bullshit. [Elkunchwar. 279]

She is so exasperated that she is ready to leave the flat but then Aruna tries to calm her down and the two friends come to reconciliation once again only after some time we hear Dolon admitting the truth that she had slept with Aruna's lover the same night the latter had broken up the relationship.

I have betrayed you..... You and Avi parted ways on that day. And you said to me, "Go, be with him. I can manage myself. But he is being ripped apart"..... When I came back from him, I was full of him..... And I never told you. When I went to him, he was writhing in pain. As I tried to console him- I forgot everything at that moment. Your relationship with him. Our friendship. The happiness I got was so overpowering. When I saw you crying, I felt like covering you with that happiness..... I never met Avi after that. [Elkunchwar. 285]

The entire episode is handled very maturely by Aruna. She takes Dolon in her arms and says:

Enough, my precious. It is the past. Leave it behind. You needn't have told me all this. You did. So it's okay. [Elkunchwar. 286]

Relationships are meant to be handled with love and care. In spite of the fact that Aruna, Dolon and Subhadra have their own very personal selves but still there is a feeling of intense satisfaction, happiness and security among them which is undoubtedly echoed in Subhadra's words:

See how happy we three are! Pure Bliss! [Elkunchwar. 269]

7. CRITICAL OVERVIEW

Elkunchwar in his notes on theatre remarks-

The truth is that if the text is performance- worthy, then it inevitably becomes literature and if it is not performance worthy, then no matter how beautiful or 'literary' a language it is written in, forget being dramatic, it is not even literature and is full of tedious superfluities. [Elkunchwar. 327]

Unquestionably, "Sonata" has paved its way to become an excellent piece of literature which mirrors the society. In one of the articles, "The Sonata of Sultry Sirens", Vasanthi has stated about the three friends and the play in general-

The play offers incisive insights into the different lives they lead, their aims and dreams, their relationships and diversity. The interesting angles in the play include the undercurrents of familiar bonding, underlying sexuality and the comfort zone they share despite their differences. On a parallel plane the play also highlights the stark realities of life in a metro: loneliness, gender issues and isolation and impersonal relationships. [<http://www.buzzintown.com/>]

Hence, the structure and the pace of the play "Sonata", which takes its name from one of the most important forms in western music "The Moonlight Sonata" conforms perfectly to the behavioral patterns and the three movements- Adagio, allegretto and rondo of "Moonlight Sonata" that forms the musical matrix of the narrative.

8. CONCLUSION

The play "Sonata" which was originally written in Marathi has crossed all the barriers and gone beyond the frontiers of the Marathi theatre – especially into Bengali, Hindi and English, to name but a few. Translators and translations have always played a great role for several regional literatures of the country to reach all the Indian readers. It is an obvious picture that India has become a paradise of translators paving an immense scope for translations in our country.

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